

17 - CELEBRATING THE NEW COVENANT

From the very beginning, God has provided tangible ways for us to express our faith in Him or to choose to disobey. His government of love will always uphold our freedom of choice. While God is able to discern “the thoughts and intents of the heart” Hebrews 4:12, everyone else is not. To help others know He is being fair and just, He will point to tangible expressions of faith and the fruit of the Holy Spirit to reveal what is in our hearts (Matthew 7:20; 2 Corinthians 5:10) .

The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil gave Adam and Eve a tangible way to express their faith in God or choose to learn about evil (Genesis 2:17). When they ate from the tree, everyone in the universe knew what choice they had made and that the wages of sin is death.

After they sinned, the plan of salvation went into effect immediately, for Jesus was “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” Rev. 13:8. Jesus promised to redeem the human race through His death on the cross so the human race could continue to live and every person would be free to choose life or death for themselves.

1. What does Genesis 3:21 say that lets us know an animal died the same day that Adam and Eve chose to learn about evil?

The fig leaf clothes Adam and Eve had made were very inadequate. God “made tunics of skin, and clothed them.” The garments of skin were a constant reminder that the wages of sin was death. It also reminded them that they were alive because Jesus promised to be their Savior.

2. What offering did Cain give? Genesis 4:2,3

3. What offering did Abel give? Genesis 4:4

As Cain and Abel were growing up, they would have been able to see the “cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life” Gen. 3:24.

Adam and Eve would have shared with their children the story of their own sin and God’s wonderful promise to save the world from sin.

Abel believed the promise and offered the firstborn of his sheep as a tangible way to express faith in the coming Savior, repentance for his sin, and appreciation for God’s forgiveness. When Cain brought “an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord,” he was expressing his choice to rebel against God and reject the plan of salvation.

4. How did God respond to their offerings? Genesis 4:4-7

God respected Abel’s offering, but not Cain’s. God appealed to Cain to reconsider and warned him of the danger of continuing down the path he was headed. Unfortunately, Cain held onto his bitterness and rebellion. This spirit led him to kill his brother and lie to God (Genesis 4:8,9).

Outward actions always flow from our thoughts. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” Matthew 12:34. Therefore it is vital that we resolve unhealthy thoughts and attitudes as soon as possible through confession, repentance, receiving forgiveness and forgiving others.

SAVED FOR A MISSION

5. What yearly feast did Jesus and His disciples celebrate together just before Jesus died on the cross? Matthew 26:17-20

6. What event was the Passover a celebration of? Exodus 12:21-24

7. How did this help parents teach their children about God's saving them from Egypt? Exodus 12:25-28

The Israelites were instructed to celebrate the Passover as a reminder that God had delivered them from slavery and established them as a nation. This yearly event was also a tangible way for them to express their faith in the Savior to come. When children asked why they were doing this, parents were able to share the meaning behind the symbols.

8. What mission did God have for Israel? Exodus 19:5,6

They were to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” As priests, they were to represent God to the people and bring people to God. While they were a “special treasure” to God, they were to remember that God said, “all the earth is mine.” God’s plan of salvation was to include everyone, not just the nation of Israel (John 3:16,17).

Unfortunately, Israel repeatedly failed to understand and carry out their mission. They often turned away from God and tried to be like the nations around them and worship their gods (See Jeremiah 2:11-13, 28).

Because of their persistent rebellion, God allowed Assyria and Babylon to conquer them and take them captive. They learned their lesson! After returning from their captivity in Babylon, the Jews never went back to worshipping other gods.

However, out of a desire to keep themselves pure, the Jews went to the other extreme. They began to see themselves as better than everyone else and believed that Gentiles were “unclean” Acts 10:28. Through misunderstanding the Scriptures, they thought their destiny was to rule the world. They believed the Messiah would conquer the Romans and set up His kingdom on earth.

This was so ingrained in the popular teaching that Jesus had a hard time helping people understand He was coming to save the world from sin. Even the disciples dreamed about positions of power they might occupy when Jesus set up His earthly kingdom. “A dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest” Luke 9:46.

The mother of James and John asked Jesus, “Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom” Matthew 20:21. This caused the other disciples to be “greatly displeased with the two brothers” Matthew 20:24.

A SYMBOL OF TRUE GREATNESS

9. How did Jesus describe true greatness? Matthew 20:25-28

10. What attitude did the disciples have when they celebrated the last Passover with Jesus? Luke 22:23, 24

The spirit of pride and jealousy continued to manifest itself among the disciples. Jesus again said the greatest is “he who serves” Luke 22:26.

11. What did Jesus do that evening to help the disciples understand the true nature of the kingdom of God? John 13:3-11

It was very difficult for the disciples to see Jesus fulfilling the role of the servant. Peter exclaimed, “You shall never wash my feet!” Jesus responded, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me.”

Jesus knew that the spirit of selfishness, pride and jealousy was deeply rooted in the sinful nature of the human race. As the Savior of the world, He came “to forgive us our sins *and* to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” 1 John 1:9. If we don’t allow Him to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, we are saying we don’t want a Savior from sin.

12. What did Jesus say we should do for each other? John 13:12-17

Jesus instructed the disciples to follow His example and “wash one another's feet.” In the time of Jesus, washing feet was a necessity. People wore sandals without stockings and the streets were dirty. While the physical need for washing one another’s feet is not as great today, the spiritual need for cleansing is vital. Jesus asked us to wash each other’s feet as a tangible reminder that:

- We need to be cleansed from all unrighteousness.
- Jesus is the One who cleanses us from all unrighteousness.
- We are representatives of Jesus to serve and help one another.

This tangible expression of faith is a humbling experience. That is why Jesus asked us to do it. He knew how easy it is for us to fall back into the spirit of pride, greed, and jealousy.

CELEBRATING THE NEW COVENANT

13. How is Christ referred to in 1 Corinthians 5:7 and 1 Peter 1:19?

Jesus is the Passover Lamb. The Passover lamb was to “be without blemish” Exodus 12:5. It represented “the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” 1 Peter 1:19. In order for Jesus to be our Savior, He had to live without sin Himself. Fortunately, He “committed no sin; nor was deceit found in His mouth” 1 Peter 2:22.

14. What did the unleavened bread represent? 1 Corinthians 5:7,8

The Passover was the first day of the feast of unleavened bread, which lasted for 7 days. Throughout the week, they were not to eat anything with leaven. Paul compares the leaven to malice and wickedness. As Christians, He encourages us to live with sincerity and truth.

15. What meaning did Jesus give to the bread and juice when He celebrated the Passover just before he died? Matthew 26:26-29

- A. Bread “This is My _____.”
B. Fruit of the Vine “This is My _____ of the new covenant.”

Two days earlier Jesus announced that He would be crucified on Passover (Matthew 26:2). Jesus knew He was “the Lamb of God” who would take “away the sin of the world!” John 1:29. After His death, animals would no longer need to be offered as a sacrifice. This was communicated in a very dramatic way. As soon as Jesus died, “the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom” Matthew 27:51.

After Jesus died, offering animal sacrifices would be evidence a person rejected Jesus as the Savior of the world. In place of offering a lamb, Jesus introduced the new symbols of bread and grape juice as tangible ways to express faith in His dying for our sins.

16. How long are we to use the bread and juice as symbols to remind us of what Jesus did for us? 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Paul was not with Jesus at the last Passover meal. However, he “received from the Lord” a message to share with the church. Whenever we eat the unleavened bread and drink the grape juice, we “proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.” The broken bread is a reminder of His body that was broken for us. The red grape juice reminds us of the blood that that was shed as a result of choosing to die for our sins. Jesus said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood.” It is a forever reminder of the everlasting gospel. “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died.” 2 Corinthians 5:14.

17. How should we prepare to receive these symbols? 1 Cor. 11:27-29

We are to examine ourselves honestly and prayerfully, rather than focusing on the faults of others. We need to ask ourselves:

- Is there any sin that I have refused to confess and repent of?
- Is there anything I need to make right with another person?
- Is there anyone I need to forgive?

If we answer yes, we need to take the appropriate steps to seek reconciliation and healing. If we refuse to do this, we will remain “sick and weak.” We will not experience the healing and growth that we need.

Some feel they are not worthy to receive communion. They know they have failed God and do not feel good enough. The truth is, the unleavened bread and grape juice are a reminder that Jesus died for us even when we were “without strength,” “ungodly,” “sinners,” “wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked” Romans 5:6-8; Rev. 3:17.

When we realize our helplessness, acknowledge our sinfulness, and receive Jesus as our Savior and Lord, then the bread and juice become meaningful symbols. Through receiving them, we are expressing:

- Jesus died for our sins, as well as for the sins of the world.
- We have chosen to receive Him as our Savior and Lord.
- We believe He will return so we may spend eternity with Him.

Another part of the preparation includes parents explaining the meaning of the symbols to their children, just as the Israelites were instructed to do when they celebrated Passover (Exodus 12:26; 13:14-16).

18. What are we guilty of if we receive the bread and the juice in an “unworthy manner”? 1 Corinthians 11:27

If we receive the bread and juice without surrendering our lives to Jesus, we are simply going through the outward actions. We are pretending to follow Jesus, but not wanting Him to be our Savior and Lord. As a result, we are receiving the bread and juice in an “unworthy manner.”

This is the attitude the Jewish leaders had. When Jesus described them as sinners in need of a Savior and claimed to be the One who could save them, they wanted to kill Him. (John 8: 31-59; Matthew 23). They eventually “cried out, ‘Away with him, away with him! Crucify him!’ Pilate said unto them, ‘Shall I crucify your King?’ The chief priests answered, ‘We have no king but Caesar’” John 19:15.

If we refuse to let Jesus be our Savior and Lord, we will eventually want Him dead also. Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters.” Matthew 6:24.

THE PROMISES OF THE NEW COVENANT

19. What promises are included in the new covenant? Heb. 8:10-12

- A. “I will put My _____ in their minds, and write it on their _____.”
- B. “I will be their _____, and they shall be My _____.”
- C. “None of them shall _____ his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me.”
- D. “I will be _____ to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will _____ no more.”

The gospel is all about what God promises to do for us, not what we promise to do for Him. He will do for us what we are not able to do for ourselves. He will write His law of love on our hearts and minds so we enjoy doing His will and have a hunger and thirst for righteousness.

20. Personal thought questions to respond to. Do I want God to:

- _____ Transform me on the inside so that I delight in doing His will?
- _____ Be my God, to guide, protect, provide for, and work through me?
- _____ Give me eternal life with Him in a place where everyone is loving and trustworthy and enjoys being with God?
- _____ Forgive my sins and cleanse me from all unrighteousness?

The Ten Commandments: Prohibitions or Promises

Before we are born of the Spirit, we see the Ten Commandments as prohibitions: “You shall not....” Our sinful nature doesn’t like to be told what to do. We like the freedom to live as we please. Of course, the consequences of sin will eventually come. Self-centered living will always lead to pain, suffering, and broken relationships. The good news is God is always ready to save us when we cry out for help (Psalm 107).

When we confess and repent of our sin and receive God’s forgiveness, we will experience reconciliation with Him. God promises to cleanse us from all unrighteousness and transform us on the inside by the renewing of our minds. The truth will set us free so we are able to enjoy doing God’s will. After we are born of the Spirit, the Ten Commandments become Ten Promises. They reveal what God is going to do in the lives of all who trust Him. The Hebrew can be translated, “You will not....”

In essence, God is saying, “Out of a motive of love, you will not want to steal, kill, lie, or commit adultery, for you will not want to hurt anyone. You will honor and respect the authority and wisdom of your parents, for you will not have a spirit of rebellion in your heart.”

“You will not worship anyone or anything else, for you will learn that I am the kind of God that your heart longs for: loving, merciful, gracious, patient, faithful, just, and full of truth. You will not covet what others have, for you will be content with what I provide for you. You will find peace, joy, and fulfillment as you walk in My plan for your life.”

“When you love Me, you will want to represent Me correctly to others, rather than take My name in vain. You will also look forward to the times we have to be together. The Sabbath will be very special for this purpose, for I have given you the freedom to rest from all your daily work. As you gather with other believers to celebrate My love for you, I will bless you in order that you may be a blessing to others. Every Sabbath I want you to remember that I created you and I am the One who sanctifies you (Exodus 31;13,17). This truth will enable you to live throughout the week with peace, security, and purpose in life.”

21. What message was preached to Israel? Hebrews 4:1,2

The gospel is the same for us as it was for them. Some have believed that before the cross, people were saved by “works” and after the cross people were saved by “grace.” The Bible is clear that Jesus is the Savior for the whole human race. “There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12.

The gospel has not changed, but the symbols ordained by God to express faith in the gospel have. The laws related to the sacrificial system are no longer necessary, but the moral law of love that God promises to write on our hearts remains unchanged.

22. The promises of the New Covenant are similar to the promises God made to Israel. He promised to:

- A. Make them “a kingdom of _____ and a _____ nation” Exodus 19:6.
- B. Be their God: “I am the Lord _____ God” Exodus 20:2.
- C. Forgive their “iniquity and transgressions and _____” Exodus 34:6,7
- D. “God will circumcise your heart . . . to _____ the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul” Deuteronomy 30:6.

23. How did Israel respond to God’s covenant and promises?

- A. “All that the Lord has spoken _____ _____ _____” Exodus 19:8.
- B. “My covenant which _____ _____” Jeremiah 31:32.
- C. Jesus is the “Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better _____ . For if that first covenant had been _____, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding _____ _____, He says: ‘Behold, the days are coming,’ says the LORD, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel...’” Hebrews 8:6-9

Exodus 19:5 says, “If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant. . .” The word translated “obey” means to “listen intelligently.” The word translated “keep” means “to guard, protect.” (Strong’s Conc.)

God was not asking them to make promises to obey. He was asking them to listen carefully to what His plan was so that they would want to be His people and share in His mission. However, instead of trusting in God, they promised, “All that the Lord has spoken *WE* will do.” While it sounds wonderful, they didn’t realize how helpless and sinful they were.

24. What was the result of not trusting God? Hebrews 3:12-19

- A. They had an evil heart of _____. 12
- B. They were hardened through the _____ of sin. 13
- C. They hardened their _____. 15
- D. They _____, even though they heard God’s voice. 16
- E. They did not _____ God. 18
- F. They could not enter Canaan because of their _____. 19

As a result of their unbelief, Israel rebelled, hardened their hearts and disobeyed God. Their lack of faith and their fear of the giants led them to refuse to follow God into the Promised Land (Numbers 13:31-14:4).

LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF ISRAEL

25. How can the stories of Israel help us today? 1 Cor. 10:5,6,11,12

We can learn from their failures and also from those who had great faith (See Hebrews 11). Our sinful nature is the same as theirs. Every day we are faced with temptation and trials. Paul warns us to take heed. If we ever think that we are so strong that we don’t have to watch and pray, we will fall (For example, see Matthew 26:41).

26. What does God promise to do for us when we are tempted? 1 Corinthians 10:13

When we are tempted to compromise, rationalize, and disobey God in order to get ourselves out of a trial, we are encouraged to trust God's plan of escape instead. When we focus on God's promises, power, and plan for our lives, we will begin to see life from His perspective, rather than from our limited viewpoint. God is bigger than our circumstances. He knows what He is doing. We can trust Him with our lives.

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” 2 Corinthians 4:17,18. (2 Kings 6:8-23 illustrates this idea.)

27. What is God wanting us to experience when we receive the bread and juice? 1 Corinthians 10:16,17,21

When we eat the bread and drink the juice, we are expressing our choice to be united with Jesus. We accept His death as our death, His life as our life and invite Him to live within us. Jesus takes our invitation seriously and becomes one with us (John 14:23; Revelation 3:20). It is also a reminder that we are joined to each other, for we are “one body.”

May Jesus prayer for unity in John 17 be fulfilled in us as we:

- Rest in His grace so we may experience peace and security in Christ.
- Experience His unconditional love that we may freely love others;
- Grow into maturity that His name may be glorified;
- Proclaim the everlasting gospel so others may be drawn to Him.